

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 MCT-01 EUR-12 /080 W
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R 111400Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY SANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 929
INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SANA 1388

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, YE
SUBJECT: HAJRI ASSASSINATION

BEGIN SUMMARY: ASSASSINATION OF YEMENI POLITICAL LEADER
ABDALLAH AL-HAJRI RAISES LARGE QUESTIONS ABOUT STABILITY
AND FOREIGN RELATIONS OF YARG BUT OUR INITIAL ESTIMATE IS
THAT HAMDY WILL BE ABLE TO CONTAIN AND DOMINATE ANY CRISIS.
END SUMMARY.

1. SANA HAS BEEN SHOCKED BY NEWS OF ASSASSINATION IN
LONDON OF ABDALLAH AHMED AL-HAJRI ON 10 APRIL. ACCORDING
TO REPORTS RECEIVED HERE, AL-HAJRI AND HIS WIFE, WHO WERE
IN LONDON FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT, LEFT THEIR HOTEL ABOUT
10:30 IN THE MORNING TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL IN
COMPANY OF YEMENI SOUNSELOR OF EMBASSY, ABDALLAH
AL-HAMMANI. UNKNOWN ASSAILANT -- WHOM BBC SAID EYE-
WITNESSES DESCRIBED AS "APPARENTLY OF MIDDLE EASTERN
ORIGIN" -- OPENED CAR DOOR AND FIRED PISTOL WITH
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SILENCER AT POINT-BLANK RANGE INTO OCCUPANTS.
ASSAILANT THEN MADE HIS ESCAPE THROUGH UNCROWDED
EASTERN SUNDAY STREETS INTO HYDE PARK.

2. AL-HAJRI WAS ARCH CONSERVATIVE FIGURE WHOSE CLOSEST
FOREIGN TIES WERE WITH SAUDIS BUT HE WAS WIDELY
RESPECTED AS COMPLETELY FRANK AND HONORABLE OLD MAN

-- WELL INTO HIS 60'S -- WHO HAD SERVED REPUBLIC LONG AND FAITHFULLY. TRAINED AS A JUDGE, HE FIRMLY OPPOSED ANY DILUTION OF ISLAMIC CONTENT OF REPUBLIC; NEVERTHELESS HIS KINDLINESS AND GOOD HUMOR WAS LEGENDARY. HE SERVED HAMDI AS AN "ADVSIOR" AND AS SUCH, OUTRANKED EVERY OTHER CIVILIAN IN YARG EXCEPT PRIME MINISTER. HE WAS WIDELY SEEN AS THE NUMBER TWO MAN IN GOVERNMENT ALTHOUGH HE WASN'T ON COMMAND COUNCIL. HE ACCOMPANIED PRESIDENT ON FOREIGN TRIPS, SAW HIM FREQUENTLY HERE. HE WOULD PROBABLY HAVE BECOME PRESIDENT BY CONSENSUS HAD HAMDI DIED. HE WAS FREQUENTLY MENTIONED IN PAST AS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE.

3. HAJRI HAD BEEN PICKED BY HAMDI TO SPEARHEAD SENSITIVE ELECTION EFFORT AND IN THIS CAPACITY HAD CHAIRED NUMEROUS MEETINGS AIMED AT SETTING UP BROADLY BASED GOVERNMENT POLITICAL PARTY.

4. IT IS TOO EARLY TO KNOW MUCH ABOUT ASSASSINATION BUT IN SANA THIS MORNING TWO THEORIES ARE OFFERED.

5. FIRST AND MOST WIDELY SUPPORTED THEORY IS THAT ASSASSINATION WAS ENGINEERED BY OUSTED POLTICIANS LIKE SINAN ABU LUHUM AND FORMER PRIME MINISTER MUHSIN AL-AYNI WHO ARE IN CAHOOTS WITH NORTHERN TRIBES LED BY ABDULLAH BIN HUSSAIN AL-AHMAV. POLITICIANS HAVE LINKS TO IRAQI BAATH AND MOREOVER HAVE IN YARG AMBASSADOR TO LONDON, MOHAMMED AL-IRYANI, FRIEND AND FELLOW EXILE WHO COULD HAVE HELPED WITH INFORMATION
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IN ASSASSINATION. YEMENIS POINT TO SILENCER, SINGLE ASSASSIN, AS PROOF THIS IS PROFESSIONAL JOB LIKE IRAQI ONE WHICH KILLED MOHAMMED NUMAN IN BEIRUT IN 1975.

6. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THIS THEORY BUT ABDALLAH BIN HUSSAIN HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY ANGRY IN LAST TWO WEEKS AND AS A RESULT, ROAD TO MARIB AND ROAD NORTH OF SANA HAVE BEEN CUT TO ALMOST ALL TRAFFIC, NOT JUST GOVERNMENT VEHICLES. ABDALLAH BIN HUSSAIN'S ANGER FLOWS FROM FACT THAT HE MUSTERED VERY LARGE TRIBAL GROUP AT MARIB TO MEET SHEIKH ZAYID. EYE-WITNESSES DESCRIBED "HUNDREDS OF TENTS" AROUND MARIB AIRPORT. HAMDI WOULD HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO CREATE GOVERNMENT PRESENCE IN MARIB IF ZAYID WENT TO SEE PLANNED UAE PROJECT FOR NEW DAM AT MARIB, AND SO HE SIMPLY REROUTED SHEIKH ZAYID TO OTHER CITIES IN YEMEN. ABDALLAH BIN HUSSAIN LOST GREAT FACE AND ALL HIS REMAINING PATIENCE. WE HAVE REPORTS (FROM POOR SOURCES) THAT SAADA IS BESEIGED AND TRIBES THROUGHOUT NORTH

AND EAST HAVE JOINED FORCES WITH ABDALLAH BIN HUSSAIN
IN REACTION TO HAMDI"COMMUNIST"POLICY OF MEETING
AND DEALING WITH SOUTH YEMEN. WE DON'T KNOW HOW
SERIOUS TRIBAL INSURRECTION IS BUT THERE ARE PROBLEMS
AND WE HAVE BANNED AMERICAN TRAVEL TO OUTLYING AREAS
IN NORTH AND EAST.

7. OTHER THEORY IS THAT ASSASSIN WAS DIRECTED FROM
SOUTH YEMEN, WHERE MORE RADICAL ELEMENTS OPPOSE
RAPPROCHEMENT WITH SAUDI ARABIA AND FEAR HAMDI'S
GROWING STRENGTH IN THE NORTH. THE ASSASSINATION WOULD
SET RIVAL TRIBAL AND GOVERNMENT GROUPS AGAINST EACH
OTHER AT THE SAME TIME AS CREATING DEEP SUSPICIONS
ABOUT THE BONA FIDES OF BOTH SOUTH AND SAUDIS TOWARD
YEMEN. FACT THAT KILLING OCCURRED WHEN SAUDI
FOR MIN SAUD WAS IN SANA TALKING TO HAMDI GIVES DRAMA
TO THIS THEORY.

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8. COMMENT. HAMDI PROBABLY BELIEVES FIRST THEORY.
IN HIS LAST TALK WITH AMBASSADOR HE LAMENTED ENCOUR-
AGEMENT WHICH LOWER RANKING SAUDI OFFICIALS HERE GAVE
TO TRIBAL FIGURES AND MISINFORMATION WHICH SENT TO
RIYADH AS REPORTS ON "LEFTIST" AND "FAITHLESS"
HAMDI REGIME. HAMDI ALLUDED IN VEILED TERMS TO
STRIKE AGAINST TRIBES, SAYING THAT YARG REFRAINED
ONLY AS COURTESY TO SAUDIS. HE ENDED -- AS HE
BEGAN -- BY PLEADING FOR US TO INTERVENE FOR YEMEN
WITH SAUDIS FOR UNDERSTANDING. THIS IS RATE
REQUEST FOR HAMDI, AND SIGNAL TO US OF DEEP CONCERN.
LAST SUCH REQUEST WAS IN FALL 1975 WHEN TURKI MISSION,
SOVIET ARMS DEAL, HALT IN SAUDI SUBSIDIES, TRIBAL
TROUBLES, CAME CLOSE TO FORCING RUPTURE IN RELATIONS.

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9. SO POSSIBILITY OF GOVERNMENT BASH AT TRIBES, AND PARTICULARLY AT ABDALLAH BIN HUSSAIN, HAMD'I'S DESPISED ARCH RIVAL, IS REAL. HOWEVER, HAMD'I WILL MORE LIKELY MOVE BY INDIRECTION IN TIME WITH HIS WELL-ESTABLISHED STYLE. HE WILL TRY TURN GENUINE REVULSION OF YEMENIS AT MURDER OF HAJRI INTO PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR REGIME THROUGH STATE FUNERALS, MEMORIALS, ETC. HE WILL TRY TO DRAW OFF SAUDIS FROM CONTACTS WITH TRIBAL FIGURES AND EAST UP ON BOTH CAMPAIGN AGAINST DOMESTIC LEFT AND ON CONTACTS WITH PDRY. HE WILL BE FIRM WITH TRIBES, BUT NOT ATTACK THEM. HE WILL RESPOND TO TRIBAL ATTACKS WITH GREAT FORCE OF SHORT DURATION. THUS WE SEE HIM REAMINING ON TOP OF ANY CRISIS WHICH MAY DEVELOP, CONTAINING IT AND TRYING TO CONTINUE HIS WELL-ESTABLISHED POLICY OF BEFRIENDING BOTH CONSERVATIVE SAUDIS AND RADICAL SOUTHERNERS, BUILDING STRONG CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AT EXPENSE OF BOTH LEFTISTS AND TRIBES AND RE-ORIENTING YARG FROM SOVIET ASSOCIATIONS IN ARMS AND POLITICS TO CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH
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WESTERN COUNTRIES.

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Message Attributes

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